

# Our Community Cares Camp in 2018

*Summer food program and enrichment camp in CESU*

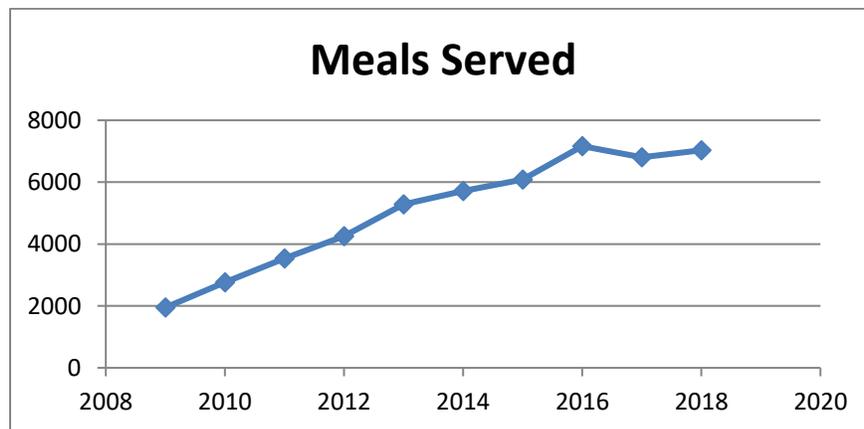
Richmond, Huntington, Bolton, Jericho, Underhill

In its tenth year, the OCCC summer food and enrichment programs for lower income children made a big impact in our communities again this summer. Here is a summary.

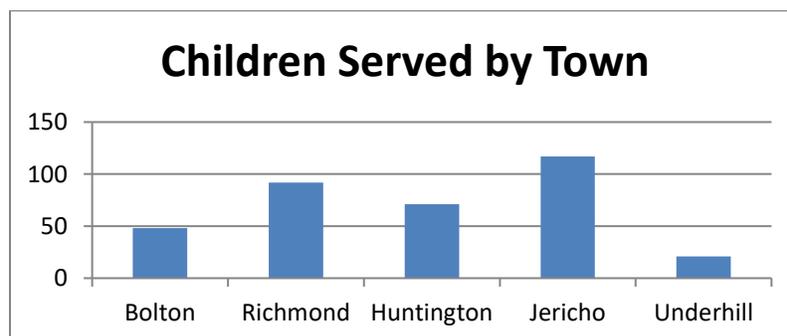
## Summer Food Program

OCCC provided four weeks of meals (breakfast and lunch) in July/August at five different locations in the CESU district. Here are the nutrition numbers for summer 2018:

**7028** meals served (up 3.3% from 2017)



**332** children under age 18 served



The five meal sites OCCC ran this summer were done in partnership with the CESU school district, Jericho Recreation Program, and two town libraries. Meals were served in four of the five towns: at Camel's Hump Middle School, Jericho Elementary School, Browns River Middle School, and the Jericho and Huntington libraries. The availability of meals enhances the other programs and helps them to attract children who need summer enrichment as well as food – a win-win situation for the community and its children.

The meal sites target K-8 students, but are open to all under the age of 18. CESU has 381 students K-12 who are eligible for free lunch (which is 15.5% of the district enrollment). This summer, the OCCC food program fed 31% of the children who are free-lunch eligible in the district, grades K-12.

Goals for the food program also include using food as an educational opportunity. The program sets a high standard for nutritious meals, with lots of fruits and vegetables. Two local farms provide fresh produce, and entrees and baked goods are made from scratch. Children are given choices for their meals, with both favorites and new items included to expand the range of foods they eat. We discovered that the students love fresh kale chips and beet salads!

For children at the enrichment day camp, they have opportunities to learn how to prepare food as part of group activities. Also, camp staffers eat with the children, and with the child/staff ratios at 1:5, meals have a family-style feel with conversations between campers and staff the norm. Campers are also allowed as much time to eat as necessary, which relieves some of the stress of rushed lunches that they may experience in school.

One of our long-term counselors who began working as an intern at age 14 had this to say about the importance of sharing meals together, even on the first day of camp:

*"It is my first morning at Our Community Cares Camp (OCCC). I am 14 years old and I am sitting outside of the middle school awaiting the kids... Noah, my group leader, tells me to go to Bus #2 and pick up Emma, Ethan, and Olivia. As the doors hinge open, the kids pile out. Within a few seconds, Emma and Olivia are at my side, but I can't find Ethan. After looking around for awhile, a tiny boy who looks about four years old walks down the steps of the bus, shoes on backwards, eyes full of tears, desperately looking for where to go. I walked over and said, "Hey there. Are you Ethan?" He gave me a small nod, so I introduced myself and told him I was his camp counselor for the summer. As I walked into the school, with Ethan in tears, I tried unsuccessfully to make conversation. After he struggled putting his backpack in his cubby, I knew what he really needed was a solid breakfast. In the cafeteria, I grabbed him some food, and we sat down at our own table. As he slowly ate, he got more and more comfortable with me, telling me about his favorite color, sports, and foods, until we were having a full conversation. As the days and weeks of camp went on, Ethan became more and more attached to me... It was amazing to see how he grew and developed at camp, and how I could be an important role model in his life."*  
(Children's names are changed.)

## Enrichment Camp

In addition to the nutritious food provided throughout the district, OCCC runs an enrichment day camp at Camel's Hump Middle School for the same four weeks to give kids access to experiences and opportunities they would otherwise now have. This year, the camp gave 120 K-8 kids access to music, art, cooking, creative play, outdoor games, sports, swimming and other field trips. Here is what the campers had to say about their experiences this summer:

### Camper Survey Results

#### New Experiences

Tried new activity	65%
Tried new musical instrument	31%
Tried new art activity	47%
Learned new game	58%
Made new friend	76%

#### Favorite activities

Games: gaga ball, alibi, tether ball, dodge ball, red rover, and basketball  
Art: dream catchers, cork boat making, spin art, puffy paint  
Music: ukuleles, drums, piano  
Science: boat building, rocket launching  
Other: cooking, puzzles, LEGOs, fort building, rock climbing, field trips

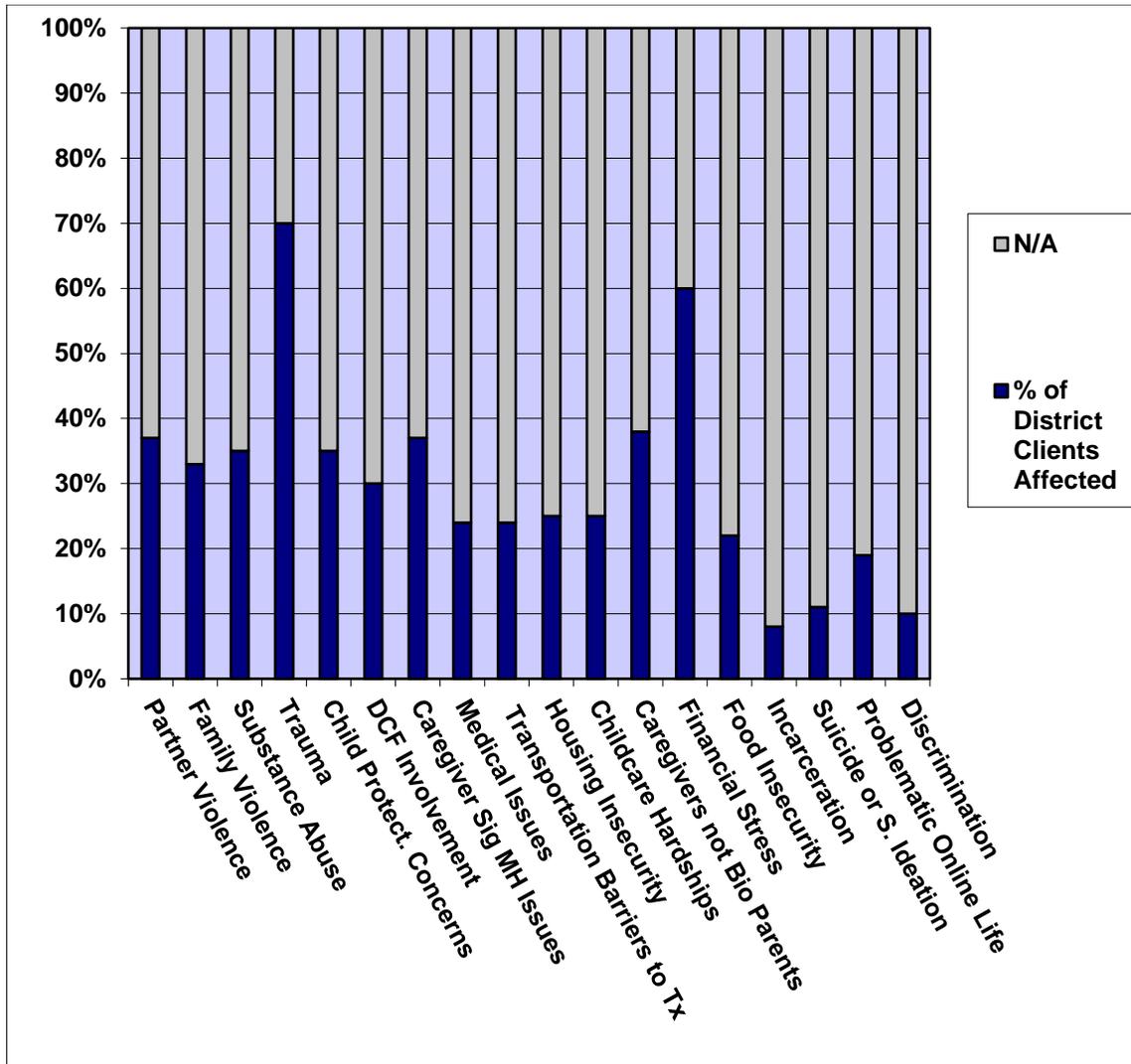
The camp also works to “feed the whole child” by creating a rich culture of acceptance, support, encouragement, and empowerment. All levels of staff feel a responsibility for this culture. Training for interns and counselors includes specific, concrete strategies for managing activities, for mastering positive communication styles, and for problem solving through role-playing and discussion with their peers and coaches during staff meeting time. The 2018 Intern Coach, Lauren Alexander, described it this way: “Communication with the interns, counselors, and senior staff was integrated into every situation during each day at camp.”

OCCC has worked very hard to create this caring, supportive community feel that extends through all the levels of the organization. Lauren Alexander summed it up well at the end of her camp experience: “After working at a different summer camp for seven summers, I thought I knew what summer camp was all about. Coming to OCCC, I was blown away by the support that staff showed one another. Counselors worked as a team and respected one another at all times, which was not typical in my past experience. Another significant difference was the approach in which counselors treated the campers, always making sure to speak calmly and remain positive. It was astonishing to see how that affected the campers, because it really did work and created positive behavior changes.”

The positive culture of OCCC is reflected in the significant number of campers who return each year, in the number of campers who become interns, and interns who become counselors. Thirty of the OCCC campers were 12-14 years old who can be left at home but opt to come to camp instead. Retention of staff is very high, with many counselors returning for multiple years: the average is 4-6 years for counselors who started as interns. The high continuity of staff from year to year adds to the secure feeling that campers experience daily at camp.

The Howard Center has shared with OCCC the data that they collected on stressors in the lives of CESU students. Many of the food and enrichment activities of OCCC work directly or indirectly on these issues, and help build resiliency in this population.

### Chittenden East School District – 2017-2018 School Year



Examples of individual student impacts this summer:

- Provided work opportunities to differently-abled teens and adults
- Provided a safe, accepting, and supportive work and camp environment for gender fluid or non-binary individuals
- Provided an opportunity for a new non-English-speaking student to be integrated into the school community before she attends school in the fall
- Provided an opportunity for a new student with autism to get acquainted with the school and participate in some activities, making integration into the school system easier for everyone
- Provided a camp space for a migrant farm worker’s child

## Summary of Employee Impacts

OCCC has created benefits to all grade levels in the CESU community through its camps and staff development. 2018 employees came from all five towns, and the job training they receive and leadership skills they develop are assets for their whole lives. Here is a summary of the impact on employees and the district.

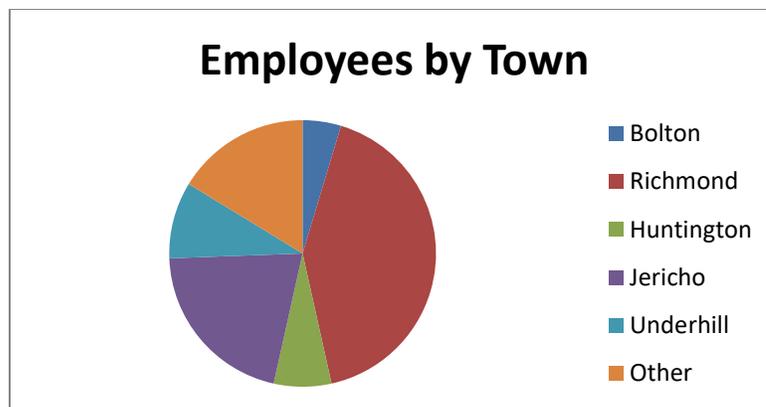
### Internship Program: Building Leaders

- The OCCC internship program for 14-16 year olds had 24 volunteers this year who served as junior counselors.
- This summer, 11 of the 24 interns were former campers (almost half), and three of those have attended OCCC since 2009.

The internship program has grown over the years to provide teens, aged 14-16, with their first work experience. They volunteer at least two weeks and receive training, coaching, and feedback to help them identify their strengths and build skills. During camp, our intern coach meets with interns regularly, and observes and aids them as they discover their ability to mentor younger campers. Being an intern is also a critical step in our camper-to-counselor ladder, helping young people set goals and develop leadership skills. One of OCCC's larger goals for interns is to help them establish the parameters of what it means to be a good employee as they move ahead into the work force of the future.

### Paid Staff

- Paid counselors are ages 16 and older, and most are students or graduates of Mount Mansfield Union High School.
  - Of 16 counselors this summer, 5 had previously been campers.
- All counselors had been interns for 1 or 2 years before becoming counselors.
  - Employees came from all five towns of CESU this summer.



- 15% of the 2018 graduating class of Mount Mansfield Union High School had been involved in OCCC at some point in their school years.

## Staffing numbers for 2018

- 12 kitchen staff
- 16 counselors
- 4 art and music teachers
- 2 program directors (K-6 and 7-8 programs)
  - 1 intern coach
- 6 administrative positions (executive director, registrar, video and photo documentation, and camper resource specialists)

## Community Partnerships

OCCC would not be successful without the numerous partnerships throughout the community. These partnerships allow OCCC to reach more children with summer food and help them find activities to keep their minds active and their bodies healthy. Partnerships include:

- **CESU:** donates space and bus transportation. In turn, OCCC provides 2 meals a day to summer school students.
- **Jericho Recreation Program:** OCCC provides food to eligible students who receive grants from individuals or the school district. Meals are offered to others at a small cost, providing a service to parents.
- **Huntington and Jericho Town Libraries:** OCCC provides “pizza Fridays” to help draw in children to the summer programming at the libraries.
- **Town of Richmond:** provides storage for camp supplies and office space year round
- **Children’s Literacy Foundation (CLiF):** provides a day of storytelling and two new books for each camper.
- **Radiate Art Space:** provides a destination for campers to experience different art and craft forms.
- **Hinesburg Nursery School:** provides a field trip destination for our smallest campers to play in their indoor and outdoor play areas.
- **Alison’s Aquatic School:** provides free access to their swimming pool for campers.